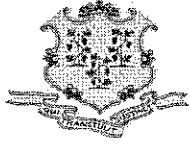


STATE OF CONNECTICUT



OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE
999 ASYLUM AVENUE, HARTFORD, CT 06105

TESTIMONY OF MICKEY KRAMER, ASSOCIATE CHILD ADVOCATE
February 15, 2011

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Miner and all other members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am Mickey Kramer, Associate Child Advocate in the Office of the Child Advocate here to testify on behalf of the OCA. As most of you are likely aware, Jeanne Milstein will be retiring from state service effective March 1st. I will serve as Acting Child Advocate until a new Child Advocate is appointed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I respectfully request your support of the Governor's proposed budget specific to the Office of the Child Advocate.

The Office of the Child Advocate deeply appreciates your support over the past many years. While our staff has shrunk almost in half over the past year or so, our commitment to ensuring the special rights of children has not. We have absolutely embraced "do more with less", and will continue to do our work in the most fiscally conservative manner possible. I would be remiss, however, if I did not share with you that our resources are currently stretched to their maximum capacity and any further erosion will undoubtedly interfere with our ability to effectively execute our responsibilities.

During the past year the OCA has responded to more than 1200 citizen requests for assistance regarding specific children, investigated concerns and advocated on behalf of more than 400 individual children receiving state funded services, conducted or participated in more than 1400 child case reviews, involving over 1500 contacts with other state agencies. In addition, the OCA reviewed over 4000 "significant events/critical incidents" reported by state operated or state funded child caring facilities to the Department of Children and Families-resulting in numerous requests by the OCA for meetings with DCF central administration to discuss troubling data and incidents and urge needed action. Because of OCA's broad authority regarding access to information, including subpoena authority, OCA is often the only entity with access to such comprehensive information. The OCA has used this knowledge and authority to inform and assist other oversight entities including the Governor, the Legislature and the Judicial branch.

This year, the OCA and Child Fatality Review Panel produced and released the first ever 10-year review of CT child fatalities. In addition, as the independent voice for children, we have participated, on multiple task forces and committees focused on understanding and addressing the challenges facing children and their families in our state today.

I am pleased to report this past year the OCA has enjoyed a highly respectful and valued relationship with the Department of Children and Families executive leadership team. The OCA has been an active participant in Commissioner Katz' DCF Transition Team, as well as the DCF Riverview Implementation Team, providing information and insights gleaned from OCA's unique access and extensive child welfare and children's mental health oversight experience. The Department has articulated a vision and plan for long overdue, sweeping reforms. Implementation has begun, but practice remains inconsistent and infrastructure is uneven and underdeveloped. While we are cautiously optimistic, the children and families of the state must experience the changes. It is critical that OCA continue to vigilantly monitor the implementation of these reforms, and continue to advocate for change wherever and whenever necessary. Today, there are still too many children who continue to have unmet needs, who are languishing in hospitals and other restrictive settings, who are in need of foster care, who are without an adoptive family, who remain in out of state facilities and whose transition to adulthood is inadequately planned or supported. We remain concerned about critically needed reforms within the newly combined Riverview Hospital/CCP and have recently increased our monitoring there because of persistent problems with over reliance on restrictive measures, inaccurate data reporting and unreliable quality assurance.

In addition, the OCA continues to advocate for needed services and supports for youth in the custody of the Department of Correction. OCA also works closely with the Department of Developmental Services in examining services to children and advocating for appropriate home and community based supports, which if provided in a timely and individualized manner, decreases reliance on out of home care. Children grow best in families.

I commend the Governor and the legislature for making education reform a priority this legislative session. Access to consistent quality education continues to elude far too many children in CT. The OCA looks forward to working with all of you as we strive to ensure that every child in CT has the opportunity to pursue his or his optimal potential.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE

MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES

